

Inspiration for your celebration

This year, we invite you to revive Aldersgate Sunday and host a **Feast of Faith**.

Take time to celebrate being the Church, share food and, inspired by John Wesley, share your stories of God at work. Acknowledge and give thanks and praise for all that God has given us, and is doing in our lives and churches.

Aldersgate Sunday is also the ideal moment in the Methodist calendar for us to consider how we live out our commitment in response to God's love and grace. How can we give back to the Church generously with our time, passion and money?

Wesley on living generously

John Wesley's experience of assurance of God's love which he experienced so vividly on 24 May 1738, became the driver of his life, shaping his preaching and demonstrated in his work with poor and needy people. He preached that we should consider ourselves as stewards; all we have – mentally, physically and in material wealth comes from God and we will be responsible before God for how we use those gifts.

“... Employ whatever God has entrusted you with, in doing good, all possible good, in every possible kind and degree to the household of faith, to all people! ... Give all ye have, as well as all ye are, a spiritual sacrifice to him who withheld not from you his Son, his only Son ...”

(from Wesley's sermon 50: *The Use of Money*)

Aldersgate Sunday is the perfect opportunity to ask all Methodists to reflect on the difference that a deeper awareness and experience of grace has made for us – to consider the value of the Church, and how we respond to all that God has given us. Do we live generously? We want to encourage you to review your personal giving and consider making a regular donation to the Methodist Church's mission as part of your discipleship.

“Do not you know that God entrusted you with that money (all above what buys necessaries for your families) to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to help the stranger, the widow, the fatherless; and, indeed, as far as it will go, to relieve the wants of all mankind? How can you, how dare you, defraud your Lord, by applying it to any other purpose? ... the more he entrusts you with, be so much the more careful to employ every mite as he hath appointed.”

(from Wesley's sermon 126: *On the Danger of Increasing Riches*)

Eat with glad and generous hearts

“Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.”

Acts 2:46-47 (NRSV)

In the early Church, the first Christians shared a fellowship meal together *before* they shared in the Eucharist/Holy Communion. Also known as an 'agape meal' ('agape' being a Greek word

meaning 'love'), this time together was an opportunity for deep human connection with one another, sharing and fellowship.

For your *Feast of Faith*, be inspired by whatever type of food your church family and community prefer. You could share brunch, lunch or even tapas together!

Why not arrange a bring-and-share or catered Sunday lunch after worship on Aldersgate Sunday, 21 May? Or have Sunday breakfast before morning worship or afternoon tea before an evening service?

How about holding a coffee morning on the Saturday before and inviting people to your Aldersgate worship the next day? Perhaps you could introduce Aldersgate Sunday by asking your younger members to make invitation cards in advance.

Share cakes in your class or house group, or get your young people involved by making and sharing (healthy!) food and faith stories in their meetings.

The following grace is also available on the organiser's prompt sheet.

Grace

Come and let us sweetly join
Christ to praise in hymns divine;
give we all with one accord
glory to our common Lord,
hands and hearts and voices raise,
sing as in the ancient days,
antedate the joys above,
celebrate the feast of love. **Amen.**

(from Charles Wesley, *Singing the Faith* 646)

Encouraging the conversation

Once everyone has food and is feeling relaxed, encourage people to share their faith stories.

To prompt people to talk, we have provided a sheet of 'conversation-starter cards'. Cut up the sheet into eight separate cards. They can be spread on the meal table so people can browse them, and then choose and answer the question that is most appropriate or comfortable for them.

Alternatively, print or copy enough for one each for everyone present and deal one to each guest as they arrive. If personal faith stories are not forthcoming, then you could ask more generally: What is the work of God in this place?

The discussion may be 'table talk' during the meal in twos or threes, or, for a more confident group who know each other well, go round and invite people to speak individually to the group.

Children and young people

If you prefer, rather than joining in with the rest of the church, the children and young people could have their own *Feast of Faith*. As they share food together, to open the conversation you could ask:

- What makes you feel close to God?
- How do you know that Jesus loves you?
- Where do you see God doing things in your life, or in others?

Be sure to create a safe space as you encourage the children and young people to tell their faith story in a way that is comfortable to them. Making food together may help the conversation flow – decorate pizzas or knead bread dough, for example. You may want to offer them alternative

media: they could write a poem, paint or make a model, make a film or choose a hymn that best expresses their relationship with God.

Living generously

We are called to love others because God loved us first. Jesus said that the first and second commandments are to love God and to love our neighbour (Matthew 22:37-39). God's new commandment is that we love each other as Christ has loved us (John 13:34).

Having shared food, fun and our faith stories, it is appropriate to take a moment to think of those living with hunger and in poverty. How can we respond to God's love for us by showing practical love for those in need in our communities? How can we live more generously?

“Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

(2 Corinthians 9:7) (NRSV)

You could make a collection during your Feast of Faith. We suggest you collect for the Methodist Church's Mission in Britain Fund, and a prayer to dedicate the offering is provided on the organiser's prompt sheet.

However, we really want you to encourage your church members to consider making a regular commitment to the connexional mission funds and donating as little as £5 per month. To do this, we are introducing a new campaign called **#igive2mission**.

I give to mission: individual giving to the Mission in Britain Fund

Many of us give to our local Methodist church through cash on the collection plate during Sunday worship, or by an envelope scheme or standing order. But when it comes to our other charity giving, do we think about donating to the Methodist Mission in Britain Fund? This fund supports outreach (including chaplaincy and telling our story through our heritage), facilitates learning, funds projects that challenge injustice, such as Methodist Action on Poverty and Justice (MAPJ) and supports the development of property to transform ministry across the Connexion. Maybe you know of a local project that has received connexional support?

By 2020, unless income increases, we expect a gap of more than £1m annually between what the Methodist Church has available to give to projects in Britain and the amount asked for through grant applications. We need to increase annual income now.

We have partnered with Stewardship to make giving easy

The Methodist Church is working with an organisation called Stewardship to ensure the process of regular giving is easy and secure online. A Stewardship 'giving account' enables you to set up one direct debit which you can then allocate to the charities you choose. Supporters can complete either a postal donation form or an online version. Through Stewardship the Methodist people can donate electronically, securely, regularly and directly, to the Mission in Britain Fund. And for tax payers Stewardship will automatically claim any Gift Aid on the donation, adding 25p to every £1 given.

A Stewardship giving account is a safe and easy way to organise your donations and only takes a few minutes to set up. You can do that at www.methodist.org.uk/igive2mission or complete and return the postal donation form (available to download and attached to the **I give to mission** leaflet.) There is no cost to donating through Stewardship.

Donating £5 a month to the Mission in Britain Fund could help support vulnerable people in society.

What to watch

Download the video *I give to mission* from the Methodist Church website to show during your *Feast of Faith*.

A handout is provided below to help you introduce the film. The film features three Methodist supporters motivated by a different aspect of the work the Mission in Britain Fund supports that speaks to their personal interests and concerns. The film then challenges us, as Methodist people, to consider giving regularly to the Methodist Church's Mission in Britain Fund, in the same way as we might give each month to other charities to which we have a strong personal connection.

In response to the film, offer an *I give to mission* leaflet to each person which they can take home and prayerfully consider.

Sharing your experiences

We hope that everyone in your church will be inspired by the stories they hear, so please share your church's stories, reflections and photos with us too. But do remember to ask permission first from every story-teller or owner of images.

- Host or attend a *Feast of Faith*.
- Send in your *Feast of Faith* photos.
- Send us any film clips that you've taken.
- Use this hash tag when posting on our social media platforms: **#FeastofFaith**
- Email us at **fundraising@methodistchurch.org.uk** with the subject line 'Feast of Faith stories'
- Post your testimonies to *Feast of Faith*, Fundraising Team, Methodist Church House, 25 Marylebone Road, London, NW1 5JR
- Phone us on 020 7467 3532
- www.methodist.org.uk/feastoffaith

And we will share your stories on the *Feast of Faith* webpage:

www.methodist.org.uk/feastoffaith

Text £5 IGIV17 to MIBF 70070 to donate £5.

You can change the amount if you want to donate more.

More information can be found on the *Feast of Faith* web page:

www.methodist.org.uk/feastoffaith

Any questions?

Please email us at **fundraising@methodistchurch.org.uk** or call us on 020 7467 3532.

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#FeastofFaith